



JOE BURBANK/ORLANDO SENTINEL

Aaron Cendan, founder of Stickless Customer Controllers and a grad student at Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy, displays one of the game consoles he has designed to assist video game players with disabilities. FIEA is a graduate video game design school at the University of Central Florida's downtown Orlando campus.

# Gamers with disabilities find more options

**BY MARCO SANTANA**  
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Aaron Cendan's new video game controller features a subtle but significant design change.

Instead of a joystick, four buttons on the left control the direction a player moves on the screen.

Competitive gamers have embraced the change because of the milliseconds it can potentially save, which could mean the difference between a win and a loss in the high-stakes world of esports.

Cendan created the controller initially for a friend whose wrist injury had limited his ability to compete.

"The nice thing is accessibility is really starting to emerge as something big game companies are getting into," said the

23-year-old student at UCF's video game development school FIEA.

The video game industry has been offering new equipment for people with disabilities in recent years, with Cendan's controller just one example of new hardware options.

Others include controllers that can be operated with one hand, through head movements and with feet.

Game makers, too, are adding features to make their products more accessible to the disabled.

In the latest version of Electronic Arts blockbuster Madden football franchise, for instance, audio cues and vibration patterns on controllers have been included for the first time to help blind people play the game.

The game's color palette also is

adjustable for those who are color blind.

"It has just been a growing awareness over time," said Karen Stevens of EA Sports in Maitland. "People have realized that disabilities are very common."

In-game options in Madden also change the size of on-field graphics, audibly read out menu items and send pulses to controllers during gameplay.

Stevens, who is deaf, initially started at EA as a programmer but soon became the company's lead executive on accessibility issues.

"Everybody should be included," she said. "I know what it's like to be left out and I know how bad it feels to be left out. Every chance I have to make something more inclusive, I try."

As the industry expands acces-

sibility, it creates newfound confidence for those suffering from different disabilities, said Ilene Wilkins, CEO of UCP of Central Florida, an advocacy group that started focused on cerebral palsy-related conditions but has since expanded to include various disabilities.

The group provides education, counseling and therapy to about 3,500 students at its Central Florida location.

"It's everything from going to school and being able to talk about Fortnite to being able to play and have common ground to talk about with their peers," she said. "People want to belong and feel like they are part of something. For kids, especially, a feeling of being a part of a bigger community and belonging is important for mental health."